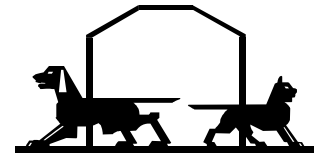




Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

Rabies



Know the facts that can safeguard you and your companion animals.

Introduction

Rabies is a viral disease found throughout most of the world, including the continental United States. The rabies virus can infect virtually all warm-blooded animals. Although roughly 90 percent of the rabies cases reported in the United States every year occurs in wildlife, a significant number occur in domestic pets, as well. Rabies is rare in dogs and cats in the United States, but cats are more susceptible than dogs and have a higher incidence of the disease. The outcome of rabies infection, for people and animals, is invariably fatal.

Transmission

Rabies transmission is usually from the bite of a rabid animal. When saliva from an infected animal is introduced into a bite wound, the rabies virus is transferred. Transmission can occur through contact between infected saliva and existing cuts or wounds on the skin, or through intact or damaged mucous membranes, although this is less common. Wild animals (primarily skunks, raccoons, bats and foxes) are the principle source of infection. But remember, not all wild animals have rabies.

Clinical Signs

The incubation period (the period of time from when an animal or human is exposed to the virus to when clinical signs first appear) varies with the strain of the virus, the part of the body that is bitten and the immune system of the

victim. Wounds on the head and forelimbs have a shorter incubation period because the abundance of nerves in these areas can accelerate the migration of the rabies virus to the nervous system, causing a quicker onset of clinical signs.

The clinical signs of rabies are variable, making diagnosis somewhat difficult. Early signs may include dilated pupils, subtle changes in temperament and increased salivation. Dogs usually have the "paralytic" form of rabies, while cats often have the "furious" form. In the paralytic form, there is increased salivation, difficulty swallowing and a change in voice. Paralysis of the hind limbs may develop just prior to death. In the furious form, the animal may become increasingly agitated and aggressive, especially toward moving objects. Loss of balance, muscle tremors and twitching and seizures often occur before death.

Diagnosis

Unfortunately, it is not possible to make a definite diagnosis of rabies in an animal while it is still alive. The standard technique is to examine a sample of brain tissue under the microscope after the animal dies or is euthanized.

Treatment

People and animals are considered to be "exposed" to rabies if bitten or scratched by a suspected rabid mammal, unless that mammal tests negative for rabies. If the mammal is unavailable for testing, to be on the safe side, exposure should be assumed.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs contact (602) 506-PETS or visit pets.maricopa.gov
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Rabies

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* For exposed pets, wash the bite area with soap and water. Wear protective gloves when washing the affected site. Take the pet to your veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian will discuss with you what to do next. The options vary, depending on whether your pet is currently vaccinated against rabies, as well as what the specific laws are in your county or state.

* For exposed people, cleanse the bite wound promptly and see your doctor immediately. Your doctor will advise you as to whether post-exposure therapy is necessary. Optimally, treatment should begin within 24 hours after exposure. This does not mean that treatment is unnecessary after 24 hours. Treatment should be started even if several months have elapsed between exposure and the recognition of exposure, because the incubation period of the virus is so variable (greater than one year, in some cases.)

Reporting

If you are in the Maricopa area and have been bitten by an animal who you suspect has rabies, contact the Maricopa Animal Care & Control. Do not attempt to capture any suspected rabid animal yourself. Call your local animal control agency.

Prevention

Vaccination of dogs and cats is critical in the control of human and pet rabies. AC&C law requires dogs and cats to be vaccinated against rabies after 3 months of age. Requirements may be different in other areas. Dogs should be licensed, and dogs and cats should have identification tags on their collars or be micro chipped.

Reducing contact between pets and wildlife is more difficult to implement, but would decrease the risk of exposure. Homeowners should not feed raccoons or other wild animals.

Pet food should not be left outdoors. Compost piles should be enclosed. Areas around bird feeders should be kept clean. Pets should never be allowed to roam freely. Although most communities have regulations for stray dog control, as well as mandatory leash laws and licensure, similar control measures usually do not exist for cats. Given the increased susceptibility that cats show for rabies (compared to dogs), cat owners should consider keeping their cats indoors all the time.

Play it safe and stay clear of wild creatures with these signs of rabies:

- *Foaming at the mouth
- *Acting drunk, unbalanced or unable to stand straight
- * Exceedingly aggressive behavior such as snarling, attacking or lunging

Keep in mind that not all rabid animals will have these clinical signs. Some animals who harbor the rabies virus may show no indications at all until the later stages of their illness.

For more information, contact:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Mail Stop A-26
1600 Clifton Road, N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30333 phone 1 (404) 332-4555

Pets Rule! **Fun Facts, Helpful Tips & Fictions**

“Human communication can also take on the strange form of sitting for hours in front of lighted boxes known alternately as television and computer. These boxes appear to be the human version of silent communication. Humor your human. Stare with them for short periods of time. Try not to yawn.”

Bob Lovka
